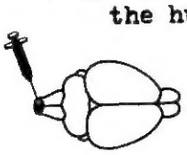
CHEAP TRUTH 7

OCT 6 - 1984

EDITORIAL. Magazines have an immediacy and recklessness unmatched by any other SF medium. Cheap, disposable, instantly gratifying, SF magazines are the thin edge of the genre's cultural wedge. And non-fiction magazines can help the SF writer and reader escape genre stereotypes and come to grips with the real social and technical issues of the human future. Welcome, then, to this special issue of CHEAP TRUTH, with the first installment of a new review section, "Squirming Mags."



State of the Field

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. $17.50/yr. This splendid periodical, reputedly edited on Ed Ferman's kitchen table, shows the long-standing primacy of small-scale craftsmanship in the SF genre. Its standards are high, its overhead low, its distribution excellent. The genre offers no better arena for young writers. The pay is modest to the point of penury, but a well-placed F&SF story can attract more attention than a novel.

F&SF is sometimes troubled by fantasies of a peculiarly matronly and suburban air. But F&SF is unafraid of relatively harsh language and radical concepts; and these often come to the rescue just as the reader is begging for insulin. A lively Books column struggles manfully for credibility and standards, and the Science column, though burdened by the increasing flakiness of Isaac Asimov, serves as a useful ideological anchor. F&SF's layout combines dignity and elegance. The covers excel, and the cartoons are funny. And at $6.50 the long-advertised F&SF T-shirts are a real bargain. They come in a vivid punk red and look great with the sleeves ripped out.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, Ohio 43305. $19.50/yr. Hard-working editrix Shawna McCarthy now luxuriates in the well-deserved ambience of her first Hugo. With Herculean effort, she has diverted a river of new writers through the Augean stables of IASFM; and while there is still plenty of crap around, it no longer actually chokes the doorways. It is now possible to buy and read ASIMOV'S and find as many as three decent stories in a single issue.

IASFM has always suffered from faanitis; it often cringingly genuflects to Neanderthal fan-letters. It also suffers from Dr. Asimov's own prolixity, for his prolificacy has now reached the terminal stage and he can write any amount of anything about nothing. IASFM still does not take its audience seriously, but at least it has stopped actively insulting it, and things are looking up.

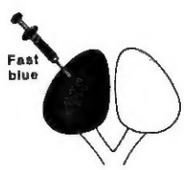
ANALOG SCIENCE FICTION/SCIENCE FACT, P.O. Box 1936, Marion Ohio 43306. $12/yr. ANALOG suffers from advanced hardening of the arteries; it has become old, dull, and drivelling. In an era of unparalleled sociotechnical ferment, ANALOG exudes the stale, mummylike odor of attitudes preserved too long. ANALOG's brain and heart are in canopic jars somewhere, while its contributors' word-processors spit out copy on automatic pilot. It is a situation screaming for reform. ANALOG no longer permits itself to be read.

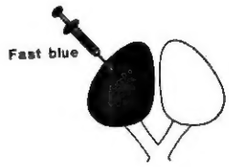
AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, P.O. Box 72089-BL, Chicago, Ill 60609 $9/yr. The venerable AMAZING declines precipitously under the smug and tactless editorship of George Scithers. In late years it has steadily lost money, circulation, and influence, and it is currently surrounded by rumors of collapse. Only a complete change in editorial outlook, plus a sudden resurgence of intensity and quality throughout the genre, could save it now.

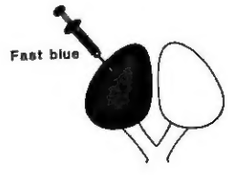
INTERZONE, 370 Avocado Street, Apt. 1, Costa Mesa CA 92627 $10/yr. This British Sf quarterly is rife with puzzling self-contradiction. It has the finest editorial ideology in the English-speaking world, bound cheek-by-jowl with stories often riddled with conceit and void of substance. Yet INTERZONE sustains hope with unpredictable bursts of appalling brilliance and a consistent improvement in design and layout. It is the only truly experimental SF magazine in the Anglophone market. Its ingenuously sincere editorial cadre have done what they can; INTERZONE's problems are symptomatic of much larger difficulties within the genre itself. INTERZONE's success depends on a general reform, which INTERZONE is bravely attempting to lead. It offers readers a unique sense of openness and risk. It truly deserves support.

THE LAST WAVE, P.O. Box 3206, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163. $8/yr. This sad and awful effort, self-billed as "The Last Best Hope of Speculative Fiction," demonstrates with ghastly clarity the utter artistic bankruptcy of the '60's idiom. Its antiquarian writers hit unerringly on the worst of both worlds, combining the intellectual sluggishness of coda sci-fi with the self-satisfied pretension of would-be literateurs. THE LAST WAVE is dead in the water.

CHEAP TRUTH 809-C West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701 U.S.A. NOT COPYRIGHTED. Vincent Omniaveritas, editing. Todd Refinery, graphics. "It is better to <u>do</u> something than to <u>be</u> someone"





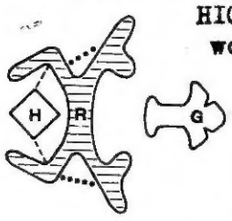


OMNI, P.O. Box 5700, Bergenfield, N.J. 07621 $24/yr. This anomalous publication, the virginal daughter of Bob Guccione's porn empire, takes the prize for peculiarity. Though its rates are the best in the business, its stories are often ignored. Genre readers resent paying $2.50 for one or two stories; while OMNI's "Boy Eats Own Foot" approach to science coverage makes its reportage highly suspect. OMNI's fiction is often excellent, but its power-mad art department has earned an unpleasant notoriety. Stories are trimmed to fit like styrofoam, occasionally without authorial consultation; sometimes, incredibly, lines are even added. Stories often bristle with non sequiturs and over-edited jumpiness. OMNI's oppressive policies and slender output of fiction conspire to keep it out of the first rank.

The Tech-Head's Workshop

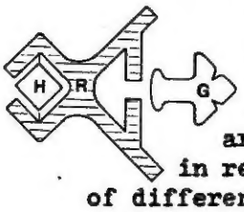
SCIENCE (Journal of the American Assoc. for the Advancement of Science) 1515 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington D.C. 20005 $56/yr. No one actually reads all of each weekly issue of SCIENCE. Research articles and papers are presented baldly, in painfully specialized vocabularies meant to preserve intellectual turf rather than to enlighten the layman. But close attention to the Letters, News and Comment, Editorials, and above all the astonishing and wonderful advertisements brings a wealth of insight to the patient reader. SCIENCE is the tribal tom-tom of the nation's scientific/technical culture, a bizarre and very human world full of odd, passionate feuds and byzantine power-structures. It is a world worth knowing, and SCIENCE, though sometimes as oblique as PRAVDA, shows it like no other.

SCIENCE 84 (same address, $18/yr.) This layman's magazine is the sister publication of SCIENCE. Its news coverage is authoritative and excellent, with fine graphics. But it often displays an irritating arrogance and condescension, and its annoyingly up-scale ads reek of East Coast yuppiedom. Genial essays and awful poetry sometimes fail to disguise its essential nature as an organ of propaganda.



HIGH TECHNOLOGY, P.O. Box 358, Arlington, MA 02174 $21/yr. This peculiar and wonderful publication is the handmaiden of yet another subculture, that of the corporate investor and industrial entrepreneur. These hard-bitten souls are impatient with academic obfuscation, which means that HIGH TECH's articles are miracles of clarity. You'll find no gushing cosmic gosh-wowism here; just cool analyses and cash-on-the-barrelhead pragmatism. Ominous articles on high-tech weaponry take a prominent place, putting the American military-industrial complex into refreshingly stark relief. Strident editorials, unique advertisements, international scope, and relentless practicality make HT an invaluable and fascinating document.

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, P.O. Box 5919, New York N.Y. 10164 $24/yr. For generations, Americans have read SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN with a vague, gnawing sense of duty, in the earnest hope of intellectual betterment. And for generations this magazine has narcotized them with its cluttered prose and useless graphics. It's pretentious and dull and we deserve better.



AMERICAN SCIENTIST, P.O. Box 2889, Clinton, Ohio 52735 $24/yr. This is the house journal of Sigma Xi, "The Scientific Research Society." Sigma Xi seems to be a clubbier, more personal group than the AAAS, and its articles are by members, who attempt to make the significance of their own work clear in relatively straightforward language. The intended audience is fellow scientists of different disciplines, rather than potential rivals for priority or funding. This distinguishes AM-SCI essays from SCIENCE papers, which are clearly intended to baffle outsiders, indoctrinate colleagues in in-group terminology, and stake irrefutable claims to particular sub-sub-disciplines. AMERICAN SCIENTIST is consequently much easier to read. It's a professional journal, however, not a popularizing work, which means that it comes with the marvelous specialized advertising that so often provokes the layman's sense of wonder.

NEW SCIENTIST, 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, N.Y. 11003 $95/yr. This intriguing British weekly has a deliberately activist point of view, replete with wry comments on swaggering Yankees, Third World exploitation, and lavishly funded military boondoggles. NEW SCIENTIST is seen as somewhat left-of-center by American standards. (With the American federal budget showing a 65% increase in "defense-related" R&D, a certain chumminess with the right-wing has become a bread-and-butter fact of life for battalions of Yank scientists.)

This is only a smattering of the smorgasboard of journals, many of them newly founded, which exist to feed the technical curiosity of the new post-industrial readership. And these are for generalists. The explosion of specialized technical journals has given the world a new phenomenon: "information pollution." This is hazardous territory, best dealt with by computer. Theorists warn us that information is losing its value: it is attention to information that must be rationed and conserved.

Technological literacy is crucial, but by no means enough. With NEW SCIENTIST, we find ourselves edging onto the slippery slope of Social and Political Issues. These journals, too, bizarre, outrageous, sometimes blackly humorous, deserve a segment of our overloaded attention. We will grapple with this topic in the second installment of "Squirming Mags."